DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 041 708 RE 002 837

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TITLE Training the Reading Resource Teacher.
PUB DATE 7 May 70
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the International Reading Association conference, Anaheim, Cal., May 6-9, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.50
DESCRIPTORS Educational Theories, Professional Training, Reading Consultants, Reading Instruction, Reading Programs, *Resource Teachers, Supervision, Teacher Education, Teacher Qualifications, *Teacher Selection, *Training Objectives, Volunteer Training

ABSTRACT

The importance of the selection process involved in setting up a reading resource teacher training program is stressed. Mentioned are three factors found to be crucial in selection: assignment to the program must be voluntary, the volunteers selected must be persons highly respected by their colleagues, and each potential reading resource teacher must have the strong personal support and confidence of the local building principal. In describing the general overall structure of the reading resource teacher training program these three major goals are named: the extending of trainees' theoretical knowledge of the reading process and reading pedagogy, the sharpening of trainees' diagnostic and remediational skills for working with individual readers, and the examination and evaluation of various methods of informal supervision and help for other classroom teachers. References are included. (Author/NH)

ED041708

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TRAINING THE READING RESOURCE TEACHER

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(Sessions: Reading Resource Teachers, Thursday, May 7, 1970, 9:00-10:00 a.m.)

Because of the unique professional role held by the reading resource teacher--halfway between a regular classroom teacher and a reading consultant or special teacher of reading--a very special kind of person is called for. Not only must she command the respect of her colleagues as an all-around professional, but in addition she must also have developed the leadership abilities necessary for working with parents, the local building principal, and central office consultants and administrators. Because of this, the selection process involved in setting up a reading resource teacher training program is very important.

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The Selection of Reading Resource Teacher Trainees

Three factors in selection have proven to be crucial. First of all, assignment to the program must be voluntary, since the additional responsibilities involved are undertaken without additional compensation. A classroom teacher "drafted" into the training program can become resentful about putting in even 18 to 24 extra hours for which she receives no extra pay.

Secondly, those volunteers selected must be persons highly respected by their colleagues. As reading resource teachers they'll have no line authority, and so their ultimate influence will of necessity come primarily from persuasion, not administrative power. In some cases, this criterion has been met by having the entire faculty vote for a teacher in whom they have great confidence. In others, the principal has chosen two or three potential candidates, and then left the final decision up to the staff. Probably the best system of all is for the faculty to submit two or three acceptable names to the principal and then let him make the final choice. Runners-up, of course, can then be considered for training in subsequent years if the program expands.

Finally, each potential reading resource teacher must have the strong personal support and confidence of the local building principal. This issue, upon which Professor Otto will speak more fully, was deemed so important in one training program that only those trainees whose principals could and would enroll concurrently were accepted into training. In this particular case, the first one extending the reading resource teacher program beyond the Madison Public Schools, it was reasoned that only a principal himself highly knowledgeable about the reading resource teacher's role and training could give the kind of personal and professional support necessary for the success of the program.

Overall Structure of the Reading Resource Teacher Training Program

Generally speaking, the reading resource teacher training programs conducted thus far have been directed toward three major goals: the extending of trainees' theoretical knowledge of the reading process and reading pedagogy, the sharpening of trainees' diagnostic and remediational skills for working with individual readers, and the examination and evaluation of various methods of informal supervision and help for other classroom teachers. Since participation in these training programs has been voluntary, and since a time limit of 18 to 24 hours of training has always been a limitation, the greatest emphases so far have consistently been placed upon concrete, practical, visibly applicable knowledges and techniques.

In format, the training courses have been team-taught, with three professors sharing in lecturing, demonstrating techniques, and then leading small sub-group discussion sections.

Participant-evaluation of the training programs, both session-by-session and after the entire series has been complete, has been regularly encouraged, with the final formal follow-up consisting of a mailed in, anonymous questionnaire. Generally speaking, participant response has been favorable. In instances where this was not the case, the suggestions obtained have been evaluated and in most cases incorporated into subsequent training programs.

Extending the Theoretical Knowledge of Reading Resource Teachers

In planning this portion of the reading resource teacher training program, great care has been taken to not short-change theory. Rather than simply amassing a pedagogical bag of tricks applicable only to very specific problems in very specific settings, the goal has been to respond to such

admonitions as that of Seattle Schools' Director of Language Arts Floyd Davis (2): "For too long colleges and universities have been producing teacher-technicians--trained in how to use published materials but not in the theory, methodology, evaluation, and understanding of the processes so vital in learning to read."

Therefore, each major approach to the teaching of reading--the basal series approach, the linguistic approach, programmed instruction, i.t.a., cross-class grouping, individualized reading, etc.--has been analyzed theoretically, with the implications of each for instruction discussed and evaluated by the class.

Of particular concern to the instructors has been the common practice of teachers combining instructional approaches in ways often pedagogically inconsistent and predestined to failure; e.g., the supplementing of a basal-series approach characterized by the presentation of a large stock of "sight" words with a linguistics-approach workbook within which only "regular" words are dealt with. Here, the reasoning has been that only a teacher well grounded in the underlying rationale of each approach can successfully build individualized instructional programs which will meet the needs of all her readers. Thus, "theoretical" considerations have been melded to "practical" ones, and the reading resource teacher trainee has become an overall reading "theorist" in the very best sense of the term. Conducting in-service presentations for her building staff, serving on curriculum committees, and helping the principal select new instructional materials are just a few of the situations in which this sort of background can be invaluable.

Another situation in which theoretical input can be of great value to the reading resource teacher is in helping other classroom teachers understand

the contributions of the supporting disciplines--psychology, sociology, linguistics, etc.--to our understanding of how children learn to read. Individual differences in intellectual abilities, maturational patterns, and experiential and linguistic backgrounds make each individual child a unique teaching challenge, and an important function of the reading resource teacher can be the transmission of the insights these fields have to offer to the classroom teacher.

A third theoretical area dealt with extensively in the reading resource teacher training programs has been the updating of trainees' knowledge of new pedagogical and methodological paradigms. In the area of effective classroom questioning, for example, the contributions of Bloom et al (1) and Sanders (4) have been reviewed and presented as models. Various reading materials have been brought into the training sessions, read and discussed in terms of instructional worth, and then used as the raw material for generating various levels of questions classroom teachers might pose in order to stimulate certain levels of reading and thinking. For many of the trainees, most of whom received their pre-service professional training a good many years ago, this approach is brand new, and response to it has been very positive.

Sharpening the Diagnostic Skills of Reading Resource Teachers

The upgrading of specific skills was included in the reading resource teacher training program for two reasons. First, as Professor Smith has pointed out, one of the common ways in which the reading resource teacher can begin functioning in a building is through the individual testing and diagnosis of particular children about whom the regular classroom teacher desires more information. Also, however, it was realized that for these

trainees to successfully undergo the role-change necessary for assuming their new responsibilities they needed some particular expertise which would change their "image"--both in their own eyes and with their colleagues. Thus, training in the administration and interpretation of at least one individual diagnostic reading test was considered to be essential.

Beyond this, however, the major diagnostic tool stressed was the Informal Reading Inventory (3). This decision, too, was made on several grounds. First of all, the IRI was chosen because it adapts easily to local conditions and locally-used instructional materials. Also, experience has demonstrated that the IRI can be easily learned and effectively utilized by most classroom teachers--the ultimate target audience of the reading resource teacher program. Most important of all, however, was the getting across of the concepts incorporated into the IRI: the criteria for Independent, Instructional, and Frustrational levels of reading materials and what these mean to the teacher building a classroom reading program. Again, then, theoretical considerations have been melded to applied ones, with classroom practice the final goal.

Preparing the Reading Resource Teacher to Help Other Teachers

The third goal of the overall training program--the strengthening of the trainees' supervisory and consultative skills--has been the most difficult one to meet, since this is an area where individual differences in personality and temperatment are so important. Therefore, the attempt has always been to offer--through demonstration, discussion, and sometimes even role-playing--a range of possible ways of influencing fellow teachers to upgrade their instructional practices. Most trainees are very sensitive about this problem, neither wishing to return to their buildings as newly-turned-out "experts" nor simply to slip quietly back into their buildings

to no effect. In all cases, then, attempts have been made for each trainee to develop her own style of approach, one compatible with her own personality.

Follow-up has indicated that in most cases this third goal was met; almost all the former trainees now function regularly and effectively as reading resource teachers. As Professor Smith has pointed out, not all function in exactly the same way; but in almost every case where a program has begun, it continues to operate, with some buildings even asking for the program to be expanded.

Summary

In general, then, the following four factors appear to be the major ones in the training of effective reading resource teachers:

1. Selection must be voluntary and such that staff and administrative support can be expected.

2. Reading resource teachers must become knowledgeable about the theory and pedagogy of reading if they're to help select instructional materials and demonstrate their use to fellow teachers.

3. A better-than-average personal expertise in diagnostic procedures is desirable, both in terms of role-needs and in terms of professional image and personal self-concept.

4. Supervisory and/or consultative modes of operation must be built upon personal styles of professional behavior, particularly because of the variety of ways in which reading resource teachers operate within different buildings.

Given these factors, then, the training of reading resource teachers appears to be practical, even within the limitations of only 18 to 24 hours of instruction. Provided with this minimum of training, and given adequate

administrative support, almost all former reading resource teacher trainees now function effectively, and in many buildings the reading resource teacher program is actually even expanding.

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